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The Ohio Department of Agriculture firmly believes that monitoring the level of contamination of produce is an important strategy in reducing the public's vulnerability to food-borne illness. Unlike most regulatory program activities that are reactive to illnesses or complaints through trace-back investigations to identify the source of contamination, the USDA's MDP and PDP sampling programs take proactive steps to food safety. Both of these monitoring programs work to increase our knowledge and safeguard our food through a systematic measurement of the frequency of contamination and exposure from various types of produce. These programs provide a mechanism for state and federal agencies to work together to determine the public's exposure to pesticides, through the PDP program, and to pathogens, through the MDP program. It makes sense to build and expand on the current food sampling and testing activities of established laboratories of state agencies. These agencies are already fully involved in the total food safety effort.

With respect to pathogens, the MDP program design helps to identify potential food safety problems before they escalate into a food borne disease outbreak. Speaking from experience, our laboratory documented a case of Salmonella contamination in a product received from Michigan. Rapid communication between our Division of Food Safety and the Michigan Department of Agriculture resulted in identification and steps taken for eradication of the source of the problem. Dr. Thomas E.

Whalen, Director of the Laboratory Division for the Michigan Department of Agriculture stated in an e-mail message:

“It appears to me that not only is the MDP program going to provide data to make food safety decisions in the future, it has already helped to improve food safety in Michigan.”

The Ohio Department of Agriculture supports the MDP program. If not for this program, we would not have had this positive result. We believe this program will be a major player in minimizing consumer exposure to produce-borne pathogen-induced illnesses.

Thank you.